

MINUTES

**City of San Diego Park and Recreation Board
BALBOA PARK COMMITTEE
April 9, 2026**

Meeting Location:

Balboa Park Club Santa Fe Room
2150 Pan American Road West
San Diego, CA 92101

Mailing Address:

Balboa Park Administration Building
2125 Park Boulevard
San Diego, CA 92101-4792

ATTENDANCE:

Members Present

Allison Soares
David Baron
Jake Banfield-Weir
Mandy Brown
Patty Riddle
Michael Robinson
Tim Shields
Michael Singleton
Kathy Vandenheuvel

Members Absent

Howard Blackson
Chris Eddy

Staff Present

Jon Richards
Tyler Canales
Anthony Harrington

1. CALL TO ORDER

David Baron called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Tyler Canales called roll.

3. APPROVE MINUTES FROM March 5, 2026, MEETING

MOTION: MOVED/SECONDED Mr. Shields/Ms. Vandenheuvel

A motion was made by Mr. Shields and seconded by Ms. Vandenheuvel to approve the March 5, 2026, meeting minutes with amendments. The motion carried (7-0-0).

4. NON- AGENDA PUBLIC COMMENT

Web Form:

None

In-Person:

Michael Warburton – Representing the Electric Building Tenet Committee. All tenants are having long-term issues. MOPA has 4 major roof leaks, History Center has issues with roots, water intrusions in the Model Railroad Museum. Sewage issues as well. HVAC has been out since December. Need resolution on these issues.

Kate Callen – Speaking on behalf of the San Diego Community Coalition. People know park has been underfunded. Public has lost faith in City to run the park. Looking for a public-private partnership structure. Would hope Committee would look into it.

Daniele Laman – Police are not enforcing the vendor ordinance Downtown due to pending litigation. Concerned this might have the same issue in Balboa Park. Made a request in January for data on how many volunteer passes were handed out. Listed upcoming Lawn Programs.

Paul Krueger – Had a large turnout for a meeting about a conservancy model for Balboa Park. Collected signatures last Saturday for overturning paid parking. Saw many issues that were avoidable. The QR code did not work, people did not know they needed their license plate to use the kiosks. Mayor’s office should have ambassadors assisting patrons with kiosks.

Katheryn Rhodes – Put forward a ballot measure for transient occupancy tax. Want to change the ordinance to add it to the Municipal Code to generate revenue. The measure has already passed the rules committee. Anaheim implemented a similar measure and saw a 33% increase in revenue.

5. **CHAIR’S REPORT**

This is Tim Shield’s last meeting. Thankful for his work and time on this Committee.

6. **STAFF REPORTS**

Council District 3 – None

78th District – None

SDPD – None

Mayor’s Office – Emily Piatanesi – Had staff in the park during the first week of paid parking at the kiosks. Lots of people did not know that ADA parking was free and noted other issues with the kiosks. Making changes to them. Have site visit planned to identify locations for additional kiosks. Made more stickers for the other payment methods. FY27 proposed budget will be released on April 15. Will go through Budget Committee next. That is where public feedback should be given.

Jon Richards, Deputy Director, Parks & Recreation – The update on the Master Plan is a scope of work has been finalized and shared with multiple vendors. Thanks to Forever Balboa Park for their work on the new Pergola and Gardens around the Botanical Building. Parks & Rec, with funding from Forever Balboa Park, procured and installed 75 lilies in the upper and Lower Lily Pond. Morley Field field lighting with be retrofit with new LED lighting in June/July. Facilities crews continue to work on repairing the Hall of Nations. Upcoming Events: 4/11- Race For Autism, 4/24 – Art Alive, 4/25 – Earth Fest, 5/1 – HPR Anniversary Celebration, 5/2-3 – HPR Ethnic Food Fair.

7. **BALBOA PARK NON-PROFIT PARTNER UPDATES**

Forever Balboa Park – Katy McDonald – Tomorrow morning, after 15 years of work, the reconstruction of the historic pergola and gardens will be revealed next to the Botanical Building. The reveal will be at 9:00am. An immense thanks to Ellie Gaffo and Jackie Higgins for their work on this project. Jackie has been keeping this project going for a long time so thank her for seeing this through. Arbor Day tree planting will take place on 4/24 at Morley Field. The Volunteer Appreciation Dinner will be on 4/30 as a

thank you to the more than 450 volunteers that help with all the programs. The Balboa Park Garden Party will be hosted in front of the Botanical Building on June 6th. Forever Balboa Park remains committed to helping maintain the park. Look forward to working with the City on the Master Plan.

Balboa Park Cultural Partnership – Peter Comiskey – Institutions are still not supportive of paid parking but continue to help work on improvements. Data continues to show the negative impact of paid parking. Data for February shows a 20% decrease in attendance. Understand that the new changes to paid parking will not be reflected in this data. Need to fix as much as we can. These are considered first steps. Need a regional solution. Appreciate the staff that have been at the kiosks and the changing of the signage. There should be a strategic approach to communications to get people to attend. Next ballot initiative is looking to move forward. More details will come.

Balboa Park Committee of 100 – Ross Porter – The Committee of 100 has published a newsletter. Envious but very pleased that the pergola is being completed. The AEA framework that was presented was accepted one year ago. Thri is a vision to have design review assistance. Staff were directed last year to provide an update regarding the framework.

Save Starlight – Vincent Puma – Visited Campillo’s office today to celebrate the change in the bus lane on Park Blvd. Graffiti is has moved over to the back of Muni Gym from Starlight. Twilight in the Park concerts are coming up. Hear people are hesitant to come due to paid parking. Come to the event on 4/26 at Balboa Park Club Ballroom.

Village Arts & Education Foundation – None.

8. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Tim Shields – Had a good, interesting and fun time on the Committee.

Mike Singleton – Having the workshop on the Japanese Friendship Garden showed what design review should be. AEA report was important to the Committee. Would like to understand why the Balboa Park Committee can not have subcommittees. They would be very valuable.

Allison Soares – Framework was great but it’s for funded projects which there current is not funding. Cannot have a subcommittee due to Brown Act requirements.

Jon Richards (Responded) – Would require a change in the Muni Code to have a subcommittee.

Patty Riddle – Would like to refer people to the Union Tribune article on 3/24. I would like to ask what the thinking was that went into the recent renegotiation between the City and the Zoological Society, which manages both the San Diego Zoo and San Diego Zoo Safari Park. Let us not forget that the City owns both the land and facilities of both the Zoo and the Safari Park. In the recent renegotiation between the City and Zoological Society, the City extended its lease for the Zoo for an unbelievable 52 more years. The only thing the City will get from the Zoological Society is an equal split of Zoo parking revenue. Oh, the City will also receive \$3 Million annually – IF . . . IF the City continues its Paid Parking Program at Balboa Park. If Paid Parking is stopped, the City does not get the \$3 Million. How did this happen? To go back to last year. The City needed revenue and consequently proposed a Paid Parking Program at Balboa Park. On July 18, 2025, I sent e-mails to each City Council member and the Mayor, saying I opposed the Paid Parking Program and detailing an alternative revenue source: the City could annually get a steady \$40 Million from the Zoological Society by claiming the annual parking fees collected at the Safari Park and applying those same fees for parking at the Zoo. The City could force the Zoological Society to agree to

this by withholding the extra property tax (called the mill tax) that has been levied on City residents since 1934. The City Charter, Section 77a, and the lease with the Zoo Society (at least the old lease) allow the Mayor to withhold the mill tax revenues if it is in the best interests of the City. Now it is. The City needs the revenue, and the City owns the land and the facilities. The non-profit Zoo Society is well off – 7 executives get over half a million dollars annually, and the Executive/CEO’s compensation is over \$2 Million. I got no replies to my revenue suggestion, and now the Balboa Park Paid Parking Program is imposed on the public. At our September 4, 2025 Balboa Park Committee’s meeting, some 200 citizens attended. We listened for over three hours to one-minute speeches by over 80 speakers representing over 18 programs. There was overwhelming opposition to the Paid Parking Program at Balboa Park, and ultimately, we, the Committee, also voted unanimously not to support the Program. At the September 15, 2025 City Council meeting, I spoke, telling them what happened at our September 4 meeting, and again spelling out the alternate revenue suggestion. And, you may remember that I continued to speak about this revenue suggestion at our Balboa Park Committee meetings, until I was finally told by the Mayor’s representative that the City was negotiating the Zoo lease with the Zoological Society. The negotiations were always kept from the public. It appears the eight-month negotiations were already completed by the time of the March 9, 2026 City Council meeting, with no opportunity for the public to give any input until the Council unanimously approved the Zoo lease - until 2078!! So - the only conclusion I can draw is that City officials have decided, in order to get that \$3 million from the Zoological Society, they will force the Balboa Park Paid Parking Program on the public permanently, regardless of the unanimous disapproval by those 200 people at our September 4, 2025 meeting, our Balboa Park Committee vote, and the many letters to the editor of the Union-Tribune. I realize the Zoo is a sacred cow and that Balboa Park is the scorned founding, but I hope the renegotiation by the City with the Zoological Society over the Safari Park’s lease will be more in the City’s and public’s favor.

Makeda Cheatom – World Beat’s 34th annual Earth Day is coming up. Frank Zappa’s band will be there. Have been hosting bird walks.

9. REQUEST FOR ITEMS TO BE PLACED ON CONSENT AGENDA

None

10. CONSENT AGENDA

None

11. INFORMATION ITEMS

None

12. ACTION ITEMS

None

13. WORKSHOP ITEMS

Item 1: Special Event Summary Form

Presenter: Viviana Zermeno, Area Manager II, Parks & Recreation

Public Comment:

Peter Comiskey – The Balboa Park Cultural Partnership seeks to ensure that all events occurring within the Cultural District are successful and do not negatively impact the programming of existing

organizations, access by, or the experience of other Balboa Park visitors. Current event form requirements to notify organizations within the park and acknowledge existing programming are often overlooked or inaccurately completed, and do not provide sufficient detail for evaluating proposed events or for enabling affected organizations to make informed assessments. In many cases, early engagement can resolve potential concerns, ensure that event organizers understand noise restrictions and setup limitations, and establish productive relationships that support event success. The Cultural Partnership believes this engagement must occur prior to committee consideration of the event. To facilitate this process, the Cultural Partnership has assigned a team member, Gillian Rizza, to coordinate meetings between event organizers and potentially impacted organizations. Accordingly, we request that scheduling and completing this meeting become a required component of the event approval process and therefore this form. The Cultural Partnership believes this requirement could replace the proposed Question 11 in its entirety; however, at a minimum, it should be included as a required subpart within Question 11.

Daniele Laman – On Summer moratorium, what’s the point of having it if every time an event comes to Committee it just gets approved. The Muni Code should be updated. How do we get it updated?

Committee Comment:

Allison Soares – Is there another way to make this easier. Can you make this a Google form? Worried about efficiency. Would recommend they have websites for the institutions on the list as well.

Mandy Brown – Add courtesy line to check calendars for item 12.

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Important because they have live outdoor events in item 12.

Mike Singleton – This form is Parkwide. Could have checkboxes on the side. Had a map with the old form. Found that to be helpful.

Item 7: Balboa Park Master Plan

Public Comment:

Michael Stepner – Critical there must be a robust public process. There have been numerous studies over the years. They must be part of the review process. Governance and finance should be critical parts of the update.

Kate Callen – Support what Michael said. The fury to public parking means everything in the park is under immense scrutiny. Should see if the City has the ability to operate the park. Consultants give a lot of presentations and community engagement is very poor.

Committee Comment:

Kathy Vandenheuvel – Looking to see significant public transit to the park in the Master Plan update. Reiterating public participation. Only concern is that when a consultant does bid, if it says it is for meetings they will bid only for meetings.

Mike Singleton – Most of the companies will put together other team members. 40% of work will be done by the City. It’s important to pair up consultant with City Staff that has experience.

14. ADJOURNMENT – 5:46 pm

Notice of Next Balboa Park Meeting:

May 7, 2026
4:00 P.M.
In-Person

Respectfully submitted,

Tyler Canales
District Manager